

*From the Rector's Study ~*

Manifesting God's Love – this is the meaning behind our celebration of this season called Epiphany. If Advent recalls humanity's anticipation of the coming in of God's presence, Epiphany recognizes the fulfillment of that anticipation. What comes into our lives, what God manifests before us in the birth of Christ, God incarnate, is the Love of God.

God's Love is not necessarily what people are anticipating when they look forward to the drawing near of God. If there is some fear, some bit of worry, Epiphany recognizes that God is not to be feared but loved, that God's presence is a loving one, and only people who fear divine love for humanity need have fear toward God. Whether it is what we anticipated or not, what is manifest before us as God comes to us in person is the Love of God for all.

The wise men of the Christmas story are the first few who quietly seem to understand that in the Christ child there is born into our world the very presence of God. Yes, the shepherds along with Mary and Joseph do know and celebrate Jesus' birth for the sign from God that is; a sign of God's favor, God's blessing upon all people 'of good will.' They try to grasp the Good News that this child is the Savior of God's people, long awaited and anticipated. But the wise men, traditionally identified as Caspar, Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, are the first, it seems, to perceive that this child is the very presence of God's very self.

And, I think, appropriately, their recognition is comparatively muted, reverent, a nearly silent awe. While the angels filled the skies with shouts and songs of celebration, while the shepherds told everyone whom they met of the Good News that has been given them, in contrast the wise men (and wise women? the term is magi, so the group may included both) are more deliberative in their approach.

Respectfully, they ask the whereabouts of the newborn king. And coming to the humble abode there is no indication that they are startled to find the object of their adoration either lying in a feeder in a barn or, if Jesus has grown to toddler-hood by time they arrive, in a craftsman's simple home. The magi know that the child they see is the presence of something much more, someone visible to them only through faith in and longing for God.

The season of Epiphany, then, is likewise a bit of a quieter season. And you and I, I think, can rightly be grateful for this. The end of 2009 was almost overly full with events unfolding in the world around us. And the seasons of Advent and Christmas were rich and busy with celebrations, but also the challenge of retiring our budget deficit and the addition of some unexpected sadness in the hospitalizations of some our folks, and for some of us the deaths of loved ones. It is time now when God seems to invite us to breathe deeply, let our lungs fill with air and our souls fill with the Holy Spirit, and relax in reverent awe of God's presence richly, wonderfully, lovingly among us.

As Epiphany begins and the new year also begins, I invite us all to look and listen and tune our senses to what it all around us. Sure, we can look up at the sky, blue and beautiful or even gray and cold, and maybe gain a sense of God's loving presence with us. But let's also look around closer in, at the people near us, at circumstance that contain us. And let's search even more deeply and discover within ourselves, each of us, the presence of God. And let us discover how this humbles us, inspires us, emboldens us, and moves us, like the wise men, to press on along the path that God alone has called us to follow.

God's Peace.

*Jim +*